

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

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INFO SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

CJCS PRIORITY

CIA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

CINCPAC PRIORITY

COMUSSAG PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 1578

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CB

SUBJ: DEATH OF FOUR STUDENT PROVOCATEURS

REF: PHNOM PENH 1508

1. SUMMARY: THERE IS NOW STRONG EVIDENCE THAT FOUR STUDENTS EARLIER REPORTED TO HAVE HANGED THEMSELVES WERE IN FACT KILLED BY THEIR GUARDS OR INTERROGATORS. ALTHOUGH GKR BELIEVES IT HAS STRONG PROOF THAT STUDENTS WERE INDEED ARMED PROVOCATEURS OF JANUARY 26 PANIC, THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THEIR DEATH ARE NOW CIRCULATING AMONG STUDENTS AND PRESS CORPS AND ARE CERTAIN TO CAUSE TROUBLE IF GKR DOES NOT MOVE QUICKLY. AFTER MEETING THIS EVENING (FEB 1) WITH PRIME MINISTER LONG BORET AND FANK COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ, PRESIDENT LON NOL AUTHORIZED A PUBLIC STATEMENT REFERRING TO THE SUSPICIOUS NATURE OF THE STUDENTS' DEATH AND ANNOUNCING THAT THOSE RESPONSIBLE HAVE BEEN DETAINED PENDING A FULL INVESTIGATION. END SUMMARY

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2. LONG BORET PROVIDED US LAST NIGHT AND THIS EVENING FOLLOWING DETAILS OF STUDENTS' ARREST AND DEATHS WHICH SUPPLEMENT AND REVISE THOSE REPORTED REFTEL:

(A) FOUR STUDENTS ARMED WITH KNIVES AND BRASS KNUCKLES WERE CAUGHT BY NEIGHBORHOOD (ILOT) AUTHORITIES IN ACT OF INCITING PANIC AND ENTERING HOMES ON NIGHT OF JANUARY 26. THEY WERE THEN TURNED OVER TO A DETACHMENT OF TROOPS FROM THE PHNOM PENH CITY GARRISON WHICH IS QUARTERED IN THIS PART OF THE TOWN INCLUDING PRESIDENT LON NOL'S FORMER RESIDENCE. THE STUDENTS SUBSEQUENTLY SIGNED CONFESSION OF THEIR GUILT. PHNOM PENH TROOPS REMOVED STUDENTS TO THEIR HEADQUARTERS NOT FAR FROM THZ EMBASSY. ON JANUARY 28 THEIR GUARDS CLAIMED THEY HAD HANGED THEMSELVES IN THEIR CELLS.

(B) AT REQUEST OF ATTORNEY GENERAL DR. EMMANUEL S. FERNANDEZ, ACTING AS CORONER, PERFORMED AN UNASSISTED AUTOPSY ON JANUARY 31 WHICH INDICATED THAT STUDENTS WERE NOT HANGED BUT STRANGLED. AUTOPSY ALSO REVEALED NUMEROUS BRUISES ON THEIR BODIES. (DR. FERNANDEZ IS BROTHER OF FANK CINC MG SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ.)

3. RADICAL UNIVERSITY STUDENT ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT LOCH LOEUN PROVIDED OUR LOCAL POLITICAL ASSISTANT THE FOLLOWING CONFLICTING AND PROBABLY LESS RELIABLE DETAILS, WHICH HAD ALLEGEDLY BEEN GIVEN TO SECONDARY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION BY THE VICTIMS' FAMILIES:

A. STUDENTS, WHO WERE IDENTIFIED AS LEANG LIM AY, SEVENTH FORM PRIMARY STUDENT, KRY LENG, FIRST FORM LYCEE STUDENT, KHEM SAVATH, FOURTH FORM LYCEE STUDENT, AND POK NARET, ALSO A LYCEE STUDENT, WERE CAUGHT WITH RIFLES AND GRENADES WHILE ENTERING A HOUSE. IN FACT THE ARMS WERE OBTAINED FOR THEIR OWN PROTECTION FROM AN UNCLE, A FANK COLONEL, AND THE STUDENTS WERE IN THE PROCESS OF RETURNING THEM TO THIS UNCLE'S HOUSE WHEN THEY WERE ARRESTED.

B. THE STUDENTS REPORTEDLY HANGED THEMSELVES WITH A SCARF WHICH THEY CUT INTO FOUR PIECES. THE FAMILY OF THE VICTIMS REPORTED HOWEVER THAT THE FACES OF THE STUDENTS WERE DISFIGURED AND THEY WERE CERTAINLY BEATEN.

C. LOCH LOEUN INDICATED THAT THIS CASE HAS ASSUMED PRIORITY OVER OTHER MATTERS FOR THE STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS.
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4. ACCORDING TO LONG BORET, THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AFTER DISCUSSING THE CASE TODAY DECIDED THAT THE CRIMES ALLEGEDLY COMMITTED BY THE STUDENTS AND THEIR CAPTORS SHOULD BE CLEARLY SEPARATED, THAT EFFORTS SHOULD NOW BE DIRECTED TOWARDS ASSEMBLING ALL AVAILABLE EVIDENCE AND THAT AN INTERIM PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT SHOULD NOT BE MADE. (THE LATTER OVER THE OBJECTIONS OF MINISTER OF INFORMATION TRINH HOANH). THE CASE AGAINST THE STUDENTS IS NOT YET COMPLETE AS THE NATIONAL POLICE HAVE NOT FILED A REPORT, LONG BORET EXPLAINED. THE EVIDENCE AGAINST THEIR GUARDS, NAMELY THE AUTOPSY REPORT, HAS BEEN PRESENTED TO THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR.

5. IN THE ABSENCE OF GOVERNMENT ACTION, WE CONTACTED

LON NOL, LONG BORET AND GENERAL SOSTHENE TO EXPLAIN THE CONSEQUENCES OF PERMITTING THE PRESS AND THE STUDENTS TO REVEAL THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE STUDENTS' DEATHS. WE ALSO URGED THAT ALL THOSE RESPONSIBLE BE ARRESTED. AT 2000 HOURS THIS EVENING LONG BORET INFORMED US THAT LON NOL, AFTER SOME HESITATION, AUTHORIZED A PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT, WHICH TRINH HOANH IS NOW DRAFTING, THAT IN VIEW OF THE SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE STUDENTS' DEATHS, A FULL INVESTIGATION HAS BEEN ORDERED AND THAT IN THE INTERIM THOSE RESPONSIBLE HAVE BEEN PLACED IN DETENTION. GENERAL SOSTEHENE FERNANDEZ INFORMS US THAT FANK PERSONNEL PRESENT AT THE PLACE OF DETENTION HAVE BEEN ARRESTED AND THAT UNIT'S COMMANDER, LT. COL. MEAS DIM, HAS BEEN RELIEVED OF HIS FUNCTIONS AND PLACED UNDER INVESTIGATION.

ENDERS

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